

NSC BRIEFING

5 DECEMBER 1956

NEAR EAST SITUATION

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I.

- B. Possible reasons for Moscow's evident caution and selectivity in doling out equipment to Syria:
1. To avoid provocation of the West;
 2. To avoid losses of materiel (especially aircraft) like those in Egypt;
 3. To assure that some special items--like infra-red (night-fighting) equipment Syrians asked for--do not fall into hands of West.
- C. Syria also continuing to rely on Moscow for diplomatic support. Foreign ministry (30 Nov) requested Soviet statement "to ease the serious situation resulting from the concentrated attack on Syria, and from aggressive intentions of Britain, France, Israel and Baghdad Pact nations."

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1. Syria probably hopes for Soviet statement on its behalf as balance to US warning against aggression on Baghdad Pact nations.

D. Syrian leftist-nationalist group is reportedly pressing government for conclusion of mutual assistance treaty with USSR.

1. Colonel Sarraj, Syrian strong man, recently said he was opposed to all foreigners, but would put up with Soviets as long as British-French-Israeli threat remained.

E. Internally, Syria's leftist-nationalist group is making good use of various rumors, threatening foreign intervention, to consolidate its own position. 25X1

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II. Recent press reports, claiming resignation of Syrian cabinet, are not confirmed. However, reshuffle or replacement of Asali cabinet is probably in offing.

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- A. Arrests of Syrian rightists continue, and plans for trial of Syrians involved in alleged Iraqi plot to overthrow government are under way.
- B. Egyptians exerting influence to eliminate politicians who have opposed anti-Western, pro-Egyptian alignment of Syria.
- C. Meanwhile, Syrian-Iraqi relations are strained nearly to breaking point:

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- D. Press and radio is continuing bitter attack on Iraq and Nuri government for plotting against Syria.

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- E. Syria also publishing lurid and exaggerated reports of internal difficulties in Iraq, in hope of keeping anti-government hostility in Iraq at high pitch, unseating Nuri.

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III. Nuri government continues to be shaky, although

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Nuri intends to ride out storm.

- A. Anti-government, pro-Nasr demonstrations, which erupted in Baghdad and southern Iraq, have been quelled--momentarily at least--by tough police and military measures.
1. Anti-Nuri hostilities in Iraq remain high, however, and further demonstrations are likely.
- B. Nuri is aware of army discontent, especially rife among junior officers.
1. He has placed loyal officers in all key army positions, and every unit, down to platoon,

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- C. In addition, Nuri government has made three new moves to reduce chances of further demonstrations.
1. Arrested group of extreme nationalists who had petitioned King to dismiss Nuri, withdraw from the Baghdad Pact, and end Iraqi ties with Britain.
 2. Proclaimed martial law in the four northern provinces.
 3. Suspended parliament for a month.
- D. Meanwhile, discussions on change of Iraqi prime ministers are being held. Thusfar, no candidate is willing to assume the liabilities of Nuri's pro-British posture.

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- E. Combination of internal disturbances and Nuri's shaky position will probably keep Iraqis busy at home, lead them to drop--at least for a time--idea of rectifying situation in neighboring Syria.

IV. Jordan meanwhile is politically in the middle between Syria and Iraq.

- A. The Nabulsi cabinet has announced that "termination" (rather than abrogation) of Anglo-Jordanian Treaty is one of Government's major objectives.

B.

1. The British are doling out treaty subsidy on monthly and even weekly basis, and any sudden break would leave Jordan's army unpaid.

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D. Basic question for Jordan, therefore, is who will pick up the tab.

1. Hussain has clearly implied he would like US to do so.
2. Other pressures, however, are for exclusively "Arab" aid, which king recognizes would not give long-term security, and behind which might be money from Moscow.

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